

Genesis 23-1 to 25-18 Torah Reading (Parshat Chayay Sarah)
English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman
Latest version November 3, 2020

The tomb of the patriarchs

23:1 It happened that the life of Sarah spanned [one hundred years] and twenty years, plus seven years. [These were the years] of the life of Sarah.
2 And died Sarah in [Kiryath Arba] that is now Hebron, in the land of Canaan. There proceeded Abraham to grieve for Sarah, [and to weep for her].
3 Then got up Abraham from the presence of his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, as follows:
4 “A resident alien I am, among you. Give me property [for a burial place] with you so that I may bury my dead, [from before me].”
5 [Then there answered] [the children of Heth]: [they spoke to Abraham], saying to him,
6 “Listen [to us my lord]. A chieftain of God are you, [in our midst]. In the choicest [of our burial places] you may bury your dead.
[No man] [among us] [will *his* burial site] deny to you, for burying your dead.”
7 [Then stood up] [Abraham] and bowed low to the people of the land—[to the children of Heth].
8 Abraham spoke to them, and said, “[If it is] [in accord with your will]
that I bury my dead from my presence, [listen to me]: [intercede for me] with Ephron, son of Tzohar,
9 [that he may give me] the cave of Makhpelah [that belongs to him], that lies at the edge of his field,
in silver at its full price. [Have him give] [the title to me] in your midst, [as a burial site].”
10 Now Ephron was sitting, among the children of Heth.
He replied—Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the ears of *Bnei Heth* [for all of those] who were coming to the gate of his city; he said this:
11 “[No, my lord]; [hear me]. The field I have given [to you]; the cave that is in it, to you I have given
[before the eyes] [of the sons of my people]. I give them to you. Go bury your dead.”
12 Then bowed Abraham before [the people of the land].
13 Abraham spoke to Ephron in the ears [of the *am ha Aretz*], saying: “[If indeed] you yourself [would hear me out],
[I offer to you] the price of the field—take it from me, and I will bury my dead, [in that place].”

23:14 [And there did reply]—[Ephron did answer] Abraham, saying to him:
 15 “My lord, hear me. [A piece of land] worth [four hundred] [shekels of silver] between me and you, what is that? Your dead, go and bury.”
 16 And heeded Abraham, Ephron.
 [And weighed out] Abraham to Ephron [the silver weight] of which he had spoken, in the ears of Heth.
 [The amount of four] hundred shekels of silver in the currency of the merchants.
 17 Thus was confirmed the field of Ephron that was in Makhpelah, which faces Mamre:
 the field, and the cave that is in it, [and every tree] that was [in the field] inside of its borders, all around.
 18 for Abraham as a purchase, in the eyes [of *Bnei Heth*], among all who came to the gate of his city.
 19 [And after that] there buried Abraham, Sarah [his wife]
 [in the cave] [of the field] [of Makhpelah] that faces Mamre, [that is now] Hebron, in the land of Canaan.
 20 Thus was established the field [as well as the cave] [that was in it], for Abraham, [to be owned for a tomb] [end aliyah] from [the children of Heth].

Chapter 24: Isaac & Rebecca

24:1 Now Abraham was old, well along in days, [and YHWH] blessed Abraham [in all things].
 2 And said Abraham to his servant, the elder of his household, [who was in charge] [of all that was his], “Place now your hand under my thigh.
 3 I will have you swear by YHWH, the God of heaven and God of the earth,
 [that you] [will not take] a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, of whom I have settled among them.
 4 [Instead of this]: [to my native land]—to my birthplace—you will go, [and take a wife] for my son Isaac.”
 5 Then replied to him, the servant: “What if [she does not consent]—the woman—to go after me, to this land?
 [Should I then] take back your son to the country, of which you came from there?”
 6 And said to him, Abraham, “Watch yourself! Never bring my son [back there].
 7 YHWH, God [of the heavens], who took me out [from the house] [of my father] [and from the land] [of my kindred],
 and who spoke to me, and who [swore to me], saying, ‘[To your offspring] I will give the land you see here’,
 [He it is] that will send his angel [before you], [so you will] [take a wife] [for my son] from there.

24:8 [If she will not] consent—the woman—to go [after you], [you will be clear] [from my oath] [that you swore].

[In any case], [as for my son], you must not bring him [back there].”

9 Then took the servant his hand, [and placed it under] the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him [regarding the matter] in question.

10 He took—[Abraham’s servant then took]—ten of the camels from the camels of his master, [and set out]

with all the goods of his master in his hand. [He set out] [and made his way] to Aram Naharayim, to the town of Nachor.

11 [He made to kneel down] [the camels, for rest], outside the city, at the well of water,

at the time of sunset, at the time the women go out [to draw water].

12 [And the servant spoke these words of prayer unto God]: |

“YHWH, God of my master Abraham, make it happen before me today,

[that You deal graciously] with my master Abraham.

13 [Here I am]—I am standing by the spring of water, while the daughters of the men of the city [are going out] to draw water.

14 [Let it be] [that that young woman] of whom I say to her, ‘Please lower your jug [and let me drink],’

and she says, ‘Drink, [and also your camels] [I will let drink]’: her you will have chosen for your servant, for Isaac.

[Through her] I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”

15 [And it happened]: [not yet] [had Eliezer finished] speaking,

when behold, Rebecca came out. [She had been] born to Betuel, [son of Milchah],

wife of Nachor, brother of Abraham. Her jug [was on her shoulder].

16 The maiden was fair [to look at] exceedingly, a virgin: no man had known her. She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and came up.

17 Then ran the servant to meet her [and said to her], “[Let me sip], I pray, [a bit of water] [from your pitcher].”

18 She replied, “Drink, my lord.” Hastily [she let down] [her water jug] [onto her arm] [and gave him to drink].

19 [When she had finished] [giving him to drink], [she said], “Also for your camels will I draw, until they have finished drinking.”

20 Hurriedly she emptied her jug into the trough, and ran [once again] to the well to draw, [and drew water] for all his camels.

21 The man [stood gazing] at her silently, wondering [if success had been granted] by YHWH to his journey, or not.

24:22 [And so it was], that when [had finished]—the camels—their drinking, he took—[the man took] a nose-ring of gold, a half-shekel in weight, and two gold bands for her arms, ten gold-pieces in weight.

23 He asked, “[Whose daughter] are you? Speak, I pray, tell me. [Is there perhaps] [in the house of your father] space for us, [to spend the night]?”

24 She answered him, “[The daughter of Betuel] am I. [He is the son of Milchah], whom she bore to Nachor.”

25 [She then said] to him, “[Both straw and fodder] there is plenty with us, [as well as a place] to lodge.”

26 [So he bowed low]—the man—[prostrating himself] to YHWH.

27 [He then spoke these words], “Blessed is YHWH, the God of my master Abraham, [since He is the One] [Who has not withheld] [his true kindness] [and His faithfulness] from my master. [And here I am] [on the road], [being led] by YHWH to the house of the kinsmen of my master.”

28 Then ran the maiden, and told the household of her mother [about these things]—[all that had happened].

29 Rebecca had a brother, and his name was Laban. He ran: Laban [ran out to the man] [who was outside] at the spring.

30 And it happened when he saw the nose-ring [and the bracelets] on the hands of his sister, [and when he heard] [these words] of Rebecca his sister, saying “Thus spoke to me, the man”, that he came to the stranger, [and behold], he still stood by the camels at the spring.

31 [And Laban said], “Come, blessed of YHWH. [Why are you] standing outside? [I myself] have cleared out the house [and made room] for the camels.”

32 Thus came the man into the house, and unloaded the camels. They gave straw and fodder to the camels, and water for washing his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

33 [They set food] [before him] to eat. But he said, “[I will not] eat until I have told my story.” [And Laban said], “Speak”.

34 [The stranger then said]: The servant of Abraham am I.

35 [And YHWH] [has granted blessing] [to my master] abundantly, [making him rich]. [And God gave to him] sheep and cattle, silver and gold, servants [and slave girls], camels and donkeys.

36 [There was born] [to Sarah], wife of my master a son for my master after [she had grown old], [and has given to him] [all that was his].

24:37 He made me swear—my master—by saying:

“[You shall not take] a wife for my son [from the daughters] of the Cānaanites, of whom I dwell in their land.

38 [But rather] [to the house of my father] [you shall go]—to my family, and take a wife for my son.”

39 [And I said] to my master, “[Perhaps it will be], that she won’t go—the woman—[after me].

40 [My lord said] to me, “YHWH—[of whom I walked] [in His presence]—will send his angel [with you], [to grant success] [to your journey].

[You will take] a wife for my son [from my family]—[from the house of my father.

41 Thus [will you be freed] from my oath: when you have come to my family; [if they do not] [give her] [to you], you are released from my oath.

42 I came today to the well [and I declared], “YHWH, the God of my master Abraham,

[if you wish] to prosper my journey, seeing that I am walking upon it:

43 [Here I am]—I came to stand by the well of water,

so that [the young woman] [who comes out] to draw, and I say to her, ‘Let me drink a little water from your jug,’

44 [and she says] to me, “You may drink, and too, for your camels, [will I give to drink],”

then she is the woman who was chosen by YHWH [for the son of my master].”

45 However I had scarcely finished speaking [in my heart], [when behold], Rebecca came out, her pitcher on her shoulder.

She went down to the spring and drew water. So I said to her, “Pray give me a drink”.

46 [Quickly then], [she let down] her jug from her shoulder, [and said to me], “Drink, [and too your camels] [I will let drink].”

[And so I drank]. And also to the camels, she gave water.

47 [I then] [inquired of her], “[Would you please tell me] [whose daughter] are you? [And she replied],

“[I am the daughter of Bethuel], [son of Nachor], who was born to him by Milcah.”

I placed the ring [upon her nose], and the bracelets on her wrists.

48 I bowed down in prostration to YHWH, [and I did bless] YHWH, the God of my master Abraham, the One [Who led me] on a path of faithfulness,

[in order to take] the daughter of my lord’s brother for his son.

49 [And so now], if you want to act [with every kindness] [and faithfulness] with my master, tell me so,

[and if not], do [tell me]. I will turn to the right or to the left.

24:50 Then answered Laban and Bethuel, saying, "[From YHWH] [has come forth] the matter.
 [We are not] [able to say] a thing to you, either bad or good.

51 Here is Rebecca before you. [Take her] and go.
 [Let her be] a wife [for the son of your master], just as was decreed by YHWH."

52 [And it came to pass], [as soon] [as it was heard] by the servant of Abraham, these words, he bowed to the ground before YHWH.

53 Then brought out the servant, [objects of silver] and objects of gold, and clothing,
 [and gave them to] Rebecca, [and some precious things] he gave to her brother, and to her mother.

54 They ate [and they drank], [both he himself] and the men that were with him, [and spent the night].
 [They got up] in the morning, and he said, "Send me back to my master."

55 And replied her brother and her mother, "[Let her stay]—the maiden—[here with us] [a few days], [or even ten]. [After that] she will go."

56 But he said to them, "[Do not hold] me back, [since YHWH] has prospered my way. [Do give me leave], that I may go to my master."

57 [They then replied], "[Let us call in] the girl, [and ask of her], [from her own mouth]."

58 [So they called] Rebecca and said to her, "[Will you go] with this man?" [And she replied], "[I will go]."

59 [And so they sent] Rebecca their sister, [along with her nurse], and the servant of Abraham with his men.

60 They blessed Rebecca and said to her, "[Our sister], may you become thousands of myriads!
 [Let them inherit]—[your offspring]—the very gate of those who hate him."

61 And arose Rebecca [along with her maids]. They mounted the camels
 and followed after the stranger. He took her—the servant took Rebecca and left.

62 Now Isaac was coming [from having gone] to the well Lahai-roi ("The Living One Who Sees Me"), for he had settled in the land of the Negev.

63 [He went out]—[Isaac went] to stroll in the field at the turn of the evening. He lifted up his eyes, and saw: Behold, some camels approaching.

64 And lifted Rebecca [her eyes], [and saw him]—Isaac, [and jumped down] from the camel.

65 She said [to the servant], "[Who is the man] [over there], walking in the field [to meet us]?"
 And responded the servant, "He is my master. She then took a veil, [and covered herself]."

66 Then recounted the servant to Isaac all the things that he had done.

24:67 [And so he brought her]—Isaac [into the tent [of Sarah his mother.
 [He then] [took Rebecca] and she became his wife, [and he loved her].
 [end aliyah] Thus was comforted Isaac, for the loss of his mother.

The descendants of Keturah

25:1 [And he went on]—Abraham—and he took a wife, and her name was Keturah.
 2 She bore [to him] Zimran and Yakshan, Medan and Midian, Yishbak and Shuach.
 3 Yakshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. [The sons of Dedan] [were as follows]: Ashurim and Letushim, and Leumim.
 4 The sons [of Midian] were Eiphah and Ephér and Enoch, Avidah and Elda'ah. [All these] were the sons (*or*: descendants) of Keturah.
 5 [And gave over] Abraham all that was his, to Isaac.
 6 To the sons of the concubines belonging to Abraham, he gave—Abraham gave to them—gifts,
 [and he sent them away], [to keep them from] Isaac his son, [as long as he] [was still alive]—eastward, to the land of the east.

The death of Abraham

7 [These, then] [are the days] of the years of the life of Abraham, [that he lived]:
 They were [one hundred years], plus seventy years, and five more years (*i.e.* 175 years).
 8 He expired—[and then died] Abraham at a good ripe age, old and content. He was gathered to his people.
 9 They buried him—Isaac and Ishmael his sons—in the cave of Makhpelah,
 [there in the field] of Ephron son of Tzohar the Hittite, [a field that sits] facing Mamre:
 10 [this being the field] purchased by Abraham, from the sons of Heth. [It is the place] where buried is Abraham, and Sarah his wife.
 11 [And it was] after the death of Abraham that blessed by God was Isaac his son.
 And there dwelled Isaac [end aliyah] by the well called *Lahai Roi* (which means: *The Living One [Who sees me]*.)

The descendants of Ishmael

25:12 [These are the records]—the descendants of Ishmael, [son of Abraham],
(which had been borne) [by Hagar], [the Egyptian woman], maidservant of Sarah, to Abraham.

13 [Here is the list]: the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names,
[according to their records]: firstborn of Ishmael Nēbayoth, Kedar and Adbiel, and Mībsam,
14 Mishna, Duna, and Masa,

15 Chadad and Tēma, Yetur, Nafish, and Kedmah.

16 These [are indeed] the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by their settlements
and by their encampments. There were twelve chieftains, [for their clans].

17 [And this was the number] of years in the life of Ishmael:

[they were] [one hundred years], and thirty years, plus seven years (137).

He expired and died. And he was gathered to his people.

18 And they dwelt from Havilah [to the region of Shur] which borders on Egypt,
on the way to Assyria. [end aliyah] Close to all his brothers, he settled.

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (<i>or</i> : azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
(Renew our days)	(She weeps bitterly).	(a fire-offering to God)

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “*God*” or “*Adonai*”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)